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Standardized Master Template – Gene W. Poor Digital Archive

Collection: Gene W. Poor Digital Archive

File Name: 2004_monitormonthly_masterteacheraward_final.pdf

Type of Material: Bowling Green State University *Monitor Monthly* Magazine

Pages Included: Cover and page 4

Title of Work: *Students Select Gene Poor as Master Teacher*

Author / Reporter: Staff

Publisher / Organization: Bowling Green State University

Place of Publication: Bowling Green, Ohio

Date of Publication: November 2004

Captured By: Dr. Gene W. Poor

Date Captured / Scanned: November 2025

Short Description:

A feature announcing Dr. Gene W. Poor as the 2004 Master Teacher Award recipient, the highest teaching honor given by the BGSU Student Alumni Association. The article highlights Poor's exceptional teaching, student mentorship, and impact in the Visual Communication Technology (VCT) program.

Expanded Description / Subject:

Dr. Gene W. Poor, founder of the VCT program at BGSU, was selected by the Student Alumni Association as the 2004 Master Teacher — the university's most prestigious teaching award. The honor includes a \$1,000 cash prize and a commemorative plaque recognizing outstanding classroom leadership.

Students consistently praised Poor's creativity, energy, and mentorship. Senior Mary Kay Coulter remarked, "He has such a passion in the way he teaches that you'd never get bored. He made me want to learn what he was teaching, and he was always willing to help students with anything — even if he wasn't their adviser."

Poor's influence extended far beyond the classroom. Through LifeFormations, the animatronics studio he founded in Bowling Green, Poor regularly mentored and employed BGSU students and graduates — nearly one-third of the company's workforce were VCT alumni.

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Monitor

MONTHLY

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Applauding faculty

BGSU's finest recognized at annual dinner

The University honored several of its best researchers, advisers and mentors at the annual Faculty Recognition Dinner this month.

Presented were two President's Awards—for Collaborative Research and Creative Work with graduate students, and for Academic Advising of Undergraduate Students by Faculty and Staff. Also given was the Elliot L. Blinn Award for Faculty-Undergraduate Student Innovative Basic Research/Creative Work, as well as new Distinguished Adviser Awards.

In addition, Faculty Senate presented the Faculty Distinguished Service Award, and students honored their choice for the Master Teacher Award. (See story below.)

President's Award for Collaborative Research and Creative Work

Sheri Wells-Jensen, English, and **Lakshmi Pulakat**, biological sciences, each received a President's Award for Collaborative Research and Creative Work and with it, \$2,500 in cash. The award recognizes innovative research and creative work by faculty members in collaboration with graduate students.

In the case of Wells-Jensen, a faculty member in the Teaching English as a Second Language program, the work was aimed at saving a dying language.

Mingo, a Native American language, was once widely spoken in this area, but by the time Wells-Jensen and her collaborators launched the Language Keeper project last year, only one fluent speaker of

President Ribeau congratulates Sheri Wells-Jensen and Lakshmi Pulakat



the Ohio dialect remained. Using a series of classes and a summer language camp, the project is attempting to revive the language by entrusting small parts of it to individual members of the Mingo tribe to preserve and teach.

Bevin Taylor, who graduated last May with a master's degree in English, was among the graduate students who have worked on the project.

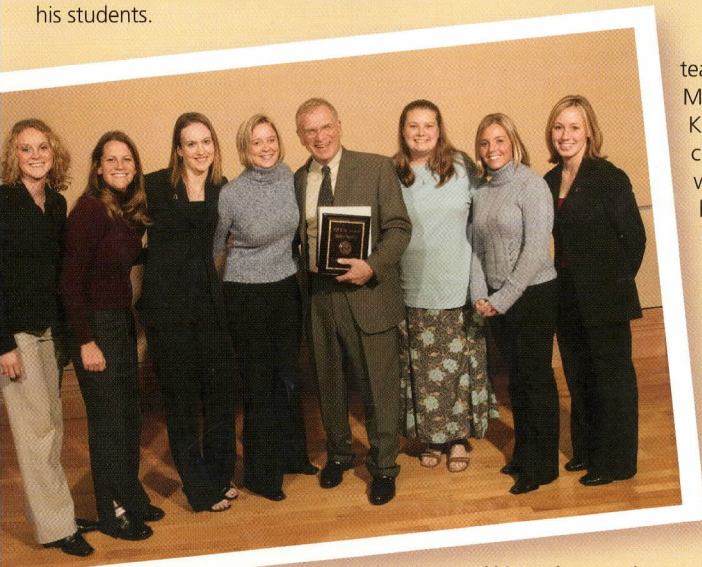
"Dr. Wells-Jensen was clearly the expert and we the learners, but she always included us as equals in this endeavor," wrote Taylor in a letter nominating Wells-Jensen for the award. "We were each given the responsibility to learn certain subparts of the language, and become experts ourselves on those subparts. We were also expected to prepare language lessons and games for the Mingo people, just as Dr. Wells-Jensen did."

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Students select Gene Poor as Master Teacher

Gene Poor, visual communication and technology education, was chosen by the Student Alumni Association to receive the 2004 Master Teacher Award. Considered the highest award given to faculty, it carries a \$1,000 cash prize and a plaque in the recipient's honor.

Poor, who came to the University in 1970 as a doctoral fellow and later founded the VCTE department, is widely known for his pioneering work in the field of animatronics but equally, on campus, for his dedication to his students.



Gene Poor and his student nominators

"He has such a passion in the way he teaches that you'd never get bored," said Mary Kay Coulter, a senior from New Knoxville, Ohio, of her experience in Poor's class. "He made me want to learn what he was teaching. And he was always willing to help students with anything they needed, even if he wasn't their adviser."

Poor continues to help his students even after they graduate. He is the owner of LifeFormations, an animatronics studio in Bowling Green, where about a third of the employees are BGSU graduates who have completed technology internships with the company.

The current industry experience that he brings to the classroom provides an

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Common Reading Experience author seeks **emotional truth**

Truth is a complicated thing," novelist Tim O'Brien told students during his October visit to campus. "Be careful about the word 'truth.' It's not all black and white in this world of ours—there are many shades of gray."

O'Brien spent two days on campus working with about 250 first-year students in BGeXperience, UNIV 100 and BG Perspective classes, in addition to giving a public lecture Oct. 20. His book, *The Things They Carried*, which was a finalist for both a 1990 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, was the campus Common Reading Experience this fall, so students were familiar with his work and prepared to ask questions.

Sometimes the questions were challenging, as the one that elicited the above response. "We heard that you visited another college and told the students a story that was a total lie. Why would you do that?" a

young woman asked.

O'Brien explained that in his stories and his writing, he strives for emotional truth as opposed to literal truth, which can never be expressed in its totality anyway. "Even if it's made up, it doesn't mean it isn't true. I'm writing about the human heart, and the emotional truth there."

Or, to quote Picasso, he said, "Art is the lie that makes us realize the truth."

The Things They Carried draws on his and his comrades' experiences as young soldiers in Vietnam, and the things he refers to were not always tangible, he explained. Sometimes they were memories, as of his first encounter with death when the little girl he had had a crush on died in the fifth grade. "She was among the things I carried."

The book does not delve into the reasons, right or wrong, behind America's involvement in the war. "I'm not really into politics—I wasn't even interested in it when I was in Vietnam. But I was interested in what was in my heart, and the way I felt."

Students asked if he sees parallels between Vietnam and today's war in Iraq. O'Brien replied that he sees similarities in the situations the soldiers are faced with:

"There's that sense of frustration and anger when you can't find an enemy to shoot back at. They're not dressed in uniform; you can't recognize them. After a while, it feels like the whole country becomes your enemy—dogs, buildings, farmers, even the earth itself. The civilian casualties are mounting up. It feels like 'Nam to me now—a lot.'"

The novelist also described the life of a writer. While outwardly very boring—sitting for hours on end in front of a computer, even on holidays and weekends—"It's not boring inside. Just the opposite." The alternatives aren't nearly as exciting as the fun of living another life, he said.

Students laughed to hear how he began writing at the age of 9, when he blatantly plagiarized a book called *Larry the Little League*, coming up with "Timmy the Little League," in which the

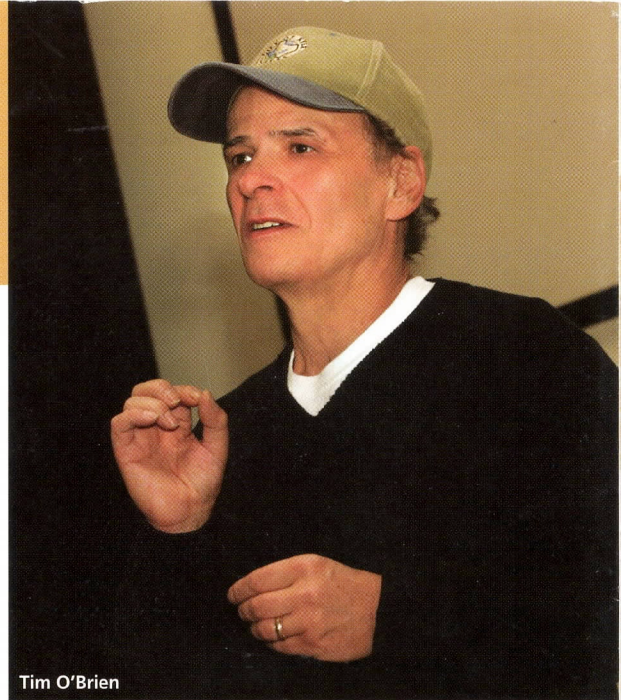
main character single-handedly won the baseball game, scoring every run, playing every position and becoming a hero.

"But that's how you start," O'Brien said. "You don't start with Shakespeare. You start with *Larry the Little League*."

Current holder of the Roy F. and Joann Cole Mitte Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University, O'Brien graduated summa cum laude from Macalester College, St. Paul, Minn., in 1968. After returning from Vietnam in 1970, he pursued graduate studies in government at Harvard University and, from 1973-74, was a national affairs reporter for the *Washington Post*.

His visit to campus was underwritten by a gift to BGeXperience from University alumni Ron and Sue Whitehouse of Harbor Springs, Mich.

Tim O'Brien



Master Teacher

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incomparable perspective for students. They praise his ability to demonstrate the application of theory to real-world situations.

Receiving the Master Teacher Award caps a series of other recognitions throughout his career for his work with students. In 1999, Poor was presented the Outstanding Adviser Certificate of Merit by the National Academic Advising Association. At BGSU, he received the 1997-98 College of Technology Adviser of the Year Award and was named co-recipient of the 1998 University Outstanding Adviser Award. The Undergraduate Student Government presented him the Excellence in Teaching Award in 1985.

In addition to his teaching and business, Poor has written two books, *The Illusion of Life: Lifelike Robotics*, published in 1991 by Creative Learning Systems, and *Animatronics: A Designer's Resource Guide*, co-authored with Rodney Heiligmann, VCTE, and published in 2003 by Ian Hunter Publishers.

Poor received bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial education in 1966 and 1968, respectively, from Kent State University. He earned a Ph.D. in educational administration and supervision from BGSU in 1972.

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Monitor MONTHLY is published by the Office of Marketing & Communications. It is distributed nine times a year to BGSU faculty and staff. Email your comments or inquiries to monitor@bgsu.edu